

The **HOURL** of **MAGIC**
and other poems by
William.h.Davies.



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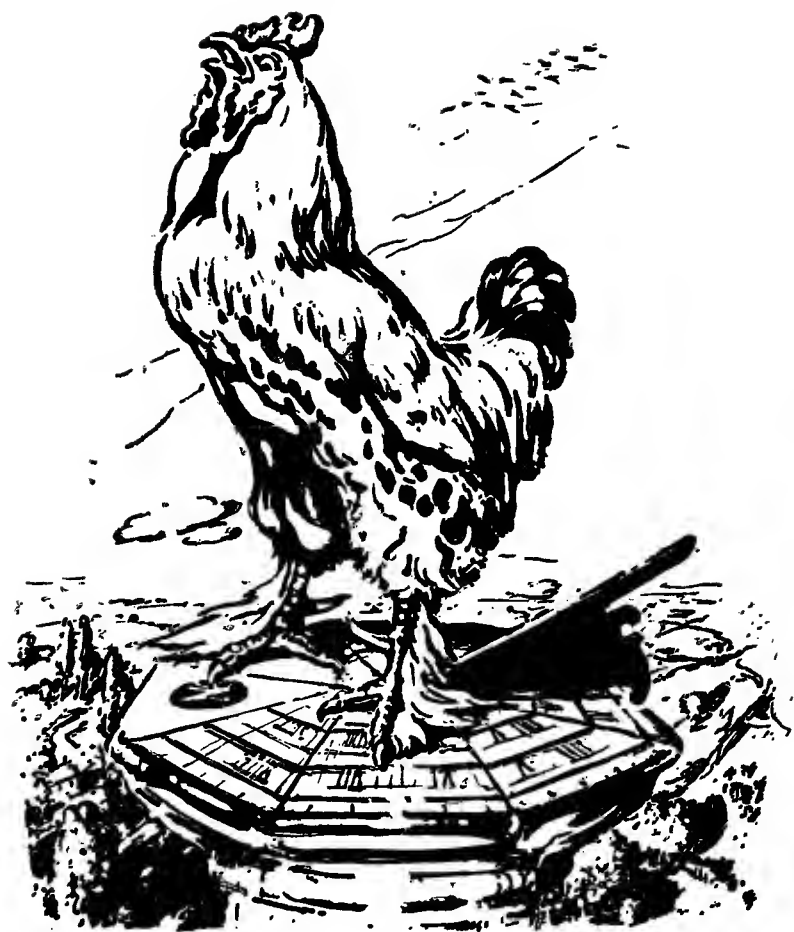
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The Hour of Magic





The
HOUR *of* MAGIC
and other Poems by
W. H. Davies



Decorated by
William Nicholson

Jonathan Cape
Eleven Gower Street, London



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To Elizabeth Drury, with our love
W.D.—W.N.

The Hour of Magic

THIS is the hour of magic, when the Moon
With her bright wand has charmed the tallest tree
To stand stone still with all his million leaves!

I feel around me things I cannot see;
I hold my breath, as Nature holds her own.

And do the mice and birds, the horse and cow,
Sleepless in this deep silence, so intense,

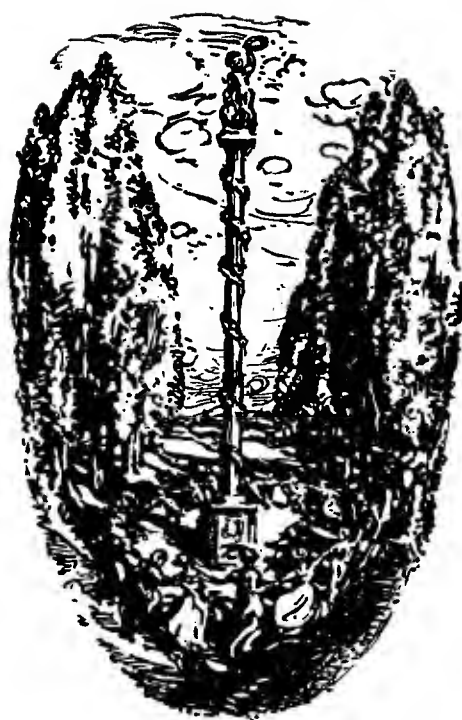
Believe a miracle has happened now,
And wait to hear a sound they'll recognise,
To prove they still have life with earthly ties?



The Beautiful

THREE things there are more beautiful
Than any man could wish to see:
The first, it is a full-rigged ship
Sailing with all her sails set free;
The second, when the wind and sun
Are playing in a field of corn;
The third, a woman, young and fair,
Showing her child before it is born.





Impudence

ONE morning, when the world was gray and cold,
And every face looked dull and full of care
There passed me, puffing clouds of silver breath,
A lovely maiden, with a jaunty air.

The red carnations flamed in both her cheeks,
Her teeth were white and shown; while either eye
Shone like a little pool on Christchurch Hill
When it has stolen more than half the sky.

And when I saw such beauty, young and fresh,
So proud, although the day was gray and cold,
"Who ever saw," I laughed, and stared amazed,
"Such impudence before in this old world!"



Wasted Hours

HOW many buds in this warm light
Have burst out laughing into leaves !
And shall a day like this be gone
Before I seek the wood that holds
The richest music known ?

Too many times have nightingales
Wasted their passion on my sleep,
And brought repentance soon ;
But this one night I'll seek the woods,
The Nightingale and Moon.



Two Women

The Mother

THE midwife nearly drowned my son,
And beat him hard, before he'd give
That cry a mother longs to hear
To prove her precious babe will live.

The Wife

I WISH that she had drowned him quite,
Or beat your precious babe to death ;
Since he has grown so fierce and strong
He'll beat me out of my last breath.

Your precious babe is now a man,
But, mother, he's not worth the skin—
As husband, father, or a son—
That he was made for living in.





Pastures

THAT grass is tender, soft and sweet,
And well you young lambs know't:
I know a pasture twice as sweet,
Although I may not show't;
Where my five fingers go each night
To nibble, like you sheep,
All over my love's breast, and there
Lie down to sleep.



Her Merriment

WHEN I had met my love the twentieth time,
She put me to confession day and night:
Did I like woman far above all things,
Or did the songs I make give more delight?

"Listen, you sweeter flower than ever smiled
In April's sunny face," I said at last—
"The voices and the legs of birds and women
Have always pleased my ears and eyes the most."

And saying this, I watched my love with care,
Not knowing would my words offend or please:
But laughing gayly, her delighted breasts
Sent ripples down her body to her knees.



Joy

POOR souls, who think that joy is bought
With pelf;
The bait that captures joy is joy
Itself.

My joy it came mysteriously
At birth;

I give it to, not take it from
The earth.

Have pity on my enemy:
Again,

And yet again, my triumph gives
Him pain.

Come, Death, give me life's perfect end;
Take me

In my sleep, Oh Death, and do not
Wake me.





Lamorna Cove

I SEE at last our great Lamorna Cove,
Which, danced on by ten thousand silver feet,
Has all those waves that run like little lambs,
To draw the milk from many a rocky teat,
Spilt in white gallons all along the shore.
Who ever saw more beauty under the sun?
I look and look, and say, "No wonder here's
A light I never saw on earth before—
Two heavens are shining here instead of one."
And, like the wild gulls flashing in my sight,
Each furious thought that's driving through my brain
Screams in its fresh young wonder and delight.



Wild Oats

HOW slowly moves the snail, that builds
A silver street so fine and long :
I move as slowly, but I leave
Behind me not one breath of song.
Dumb as a moulting bird am I,
I go to bed when children do,
My ale but two half-pints a day,
And to one woman I am true.
Oh ! what a life, how flat and stale—
How dull, monotonous and slow!
Can I sing songs in times so dead—
Are there no more wild oats to sow ?



The Grief of Others

ONCE more I see the happy young
Broken by grief and pain ;
That tears have made like earth's red worms
Turned white by days of rain.
Once more I see the new-made wife
From her dead husband torn ;
When down she sits and weeps, and laughs,
And rocks her babe unborn.
And when I see a hearse that takes
A coffin through the town,
Or pass the quiet house of death,
That has its blinds drawn down—
Such pity moves me for the dear
Ones left to mourn behind,
That I am glad my loves are dreams
Made purely of the mind:
That take expression for their grave,
When they have served their hour ;
And I create a younger brood
To charm me with new power.



The Portrait

SHE sends her portrait, as a swallow,
To show that her sweet spring will follow;
Until she comes herself, to share
With me a pillow and her hair.
To this fine portrait of my Dear,
With nothing but dead matter near,
I whisper words of love, and kiss
The cardboard dewy with my bliss.
This is her hair, which I will bind
Around my knuckles, when inclined
To bandage them in skeins of gold.
These are her lips, in paper mould,
Which when I touch appear to move,
As conscious of my burning love.
These are her eyes, now hard and set,
And opened wide, which Love will shut.
Lord, is my kiss too poor and weak
To make this portrait move and speak,
And close these eyes in fear of this
Strong love of mine, half bite, half kiss!
This kiss that would in fierce delight

Burn on her soft white flesh, and bite
Like a black fly when, stiff and old,
He's blind, and dying of the cold!
Now, when I rest awhile from kissing,
My room looks lonely with her missing.
Now empty seems that chair, where she
Could sit this night and smile to see
Her own light fingers work with grace
Straight cotton into cobweb lace;
Or when they rub that small gold band
That makes her mine, on her left hand.
O that my love were sitting there,
Before me, in that empty chair;
Rocking the love-light, where it lies
Cradled for joy in her two eyes.
Till in the flesh she comes to kiss,
Be happy, man, that she sends this—
Her own dear portrait, as a swallow,
To show that her sweet spring will follow.



A Thought

WHEN I look into a glass,
Myself's my only care ;
But I look into a pool
For all the wonders there.

When I look into a glass,
I see a fool :
But I see a wise man
When I look into a pool.





Our Sussex Downs

MY youth is gone—my youth that laughed
and yawned
In one sweet breath, and will not come again;
And crumbs of wonder are my scanty fare,
Snatched from the beauty on a hill or plain.
So, as I look, I wonder if the land
Has *breathed* those shadows in the waters blue!
From all first sounds I half expect to hear,
Not only echoes, but *their* echoes too.
But when I see—the first time in my life—
Our Sussex Downs, so mighty, strong and bare
That many a wood of fifteen hundred trees
Seems but a handful scattered lightly there—
“What a great hour,” think I, “halfway ’twixt Death
And Youth that laughs and yawns in one short
breath.”



Telling Fortunes

“YOU’LL have a son,” the old man said—
“And then a daughter fair to meet
As any summer nights that dance
Upon a thousand silver feet.”
“You dear old man, now can you tell
If my fair daughter ’ll marry well?”
The old man winked his eye and said,
“Well, knowing men for what they are,
She’ll break their hearts, because she’ll not
Be half as good as she is fair.”
The new-made wife was full of pain,
And raised her head and hoped again.
“And will my son be fine and smart
And win a noble lady’s heart?”
The old man winked his other eye—
“Well, knowing women as we do,
The kind of man they most prefer,
He’ll break their hearts, because he’ll be
A fool, a coxcomb, and a cur.”

The Collar

WHO taught fair Cleopatra how to bring
Mark Antony to her knees—the touch of love,
As soft as velvet, that could stroke the wing
Of a butterfly and take no powder off;
The gentle purr that made eternal Rome,
With all its marble, melt in that sweet sound,
And vanish like the mist, when it has come
Into a man's full height above the ground?
When I see how a cat has, even now,
With its own body curled and crouching low,
Made a large, heavy collar, soft and warm,
For that girl's neck, I think, with no alarm,
If, young one, that's your friend—as it was Hers—
I'll watch you round the corner of my fears.





To a Fool

IF, when thy body's end has come,
Thy mind must find another home,
Make no mistake with man again;
Come into flesh the thing thou art
In all except thy body's part—
Come as a silly ass, and plain.

Such were my thoughts, their honest parts,
But Oh, what liars are kind hearts!

What smooth false words such hearts demand:
"Thy dreams," said I, "give more surprise
Than when I chased bright butterflies,
And missed them with my snapping hand."



Strength

WHAT lies I read, that men of strength
Have keen and penetrating looks
That, flashing here and flashing there,
Command success—what foolish books !
For when we go to life we find
The men and dogs that fight till death
Are sleepy eyed, and look so calm
We wonder if they live by breath !
Love, too, must hold her saucy tongue,
And turn on us two sleepy eyes,
To prove she is no painted doll,
And full, like books, of pretty lies.



To Bacchus

I'M none of those—Oh Bacchus, blush !
That eat sour pickles with their beer,
To keep their brains and bellies cold ;
Ashamed to let one laughing tear
Escape their hold.

For only just to smell your hops
Can make me fat and laugh all day,
With appetite for bread and meat :
I'll not despise bruised apples, they
Make cider sweet.

'Tis true I only eat to live,
But how I live to drink is clear ;
A little isle of meat and bread,
In one vast sea of foaming beer,
And I'm well fed.





A Woman's History

WHEN Mary Price was five years old,
And had a bird that died,
She laid its body under flowers;
And called her friends to pray to God,
And sing sad hymns for hours.

When she, before her fifteenth year,
Was ruined by a man,
The neighbours sought him out, and said—
“You come along and marry her,
Or hang till you are dead.”

When they had found the child he wronged,
And playing with her doll,
“I’ll come along with you,” said she—
“But I’ll not marry any one
Unless my doll’s with me.”

With no more love’s heat in her than
The wax upon her arm;
With no more love-light in her eyes
Than in the glass eyes of her doll—
Nor wonder, nor surprise.

When Mary Price was thirty-five,
And he was lying dead,
She wept as though her heart would break:
But neighbours winked to see her tears
Fall on a lover's neck.

Now, Mary Price is seventy-five,
And skinning eels alive:
She, active, strong, and full of breath,
Has caught the cat that stole an eel,
And beaten it to death.



The Trance

THE Moon is beautiful this night :
She is so clear and bright,
That should she smile
On any sleeping face awhile,
The eyes must then their slumber break,
And open, wide awake ;
And should she pass a sleeping bird,
Where no leaves touch or meet,
He'll wake and, in his softest voice,
Cry Sweet ! Sweet ! Sweet !
The Moon is beautiful, but who is this
That hides his face from hers ;
That, when she makes eyes through the leaves,
Is full of trembling fears ?
The night breeds many a thing that's strange :
The wretched owl that in distress
Hoots every star that comes to help
The evening in her loveliness ;
The half-blind bats that here and there
Are floundering in the twilight air ;
The rat, that shows his long white teeth

Of hard, unbreakable bone—
That take him where his notions go,
Through wood and lead, cement and stone;
And cats, that have the power,
About the midnight hour,
To hide their bodies' size
Behind two small green eyes.
The night has these—but who is this
That like a shadow glides
Across the shadows of the trees,
And his own visage hides?
He hides his face—we wonder what
That face would look like in the sun:
Perhaps an ugly bloated thing
That has more heavy chins than one;
Or is it sharp and white and thin,
With a long nose that tries to hook
Almost as sharp a chin—
And with a cold, hard, cruel look?
We cannot say, but this is sure—
If we this night saw *it*,
We'd rush to strike that monster down,

To drown him in our common spit.

* * *

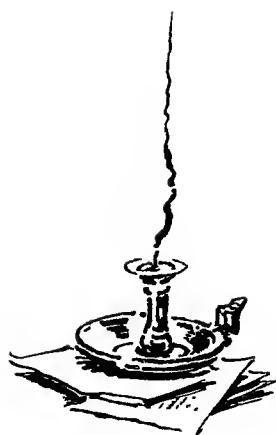
This morning, when the blackbird near
Was frightened from his thirteenth song,
There was a lady buried here—
A lady, beautiful and young.
And all the rings she wore in life,
As one betrothed and as a wife,
Were left upon her fingers still,
According to her living will.
But there was one who thought and thought,
Until one thought possessed his head;
And now he goes, though full of fear
Of that clear moon, to rob the dead.
I will not say
Whose beauty had less fault:
That lady, where she lay,
Or that fair moon outside,
That kissed the mouth of her black vault.
Oh God, it was a lovely sight:
She was so beautiful in death,
That, till her own looks pitied her,
No mortal could with living breath.
But what cared he for her fair face

When, by his lamp, in that dark place,
He saw the jewels there,
Shaking with life, and greedy, where
They nibbled at the small, gold bands
On her cold, lifeless hands:
But though he turns those rings around,
They make no downward move, when pulled,
To come from her white hand to his—
He'll cut her fingers off for gold !
But ah, no sooner had he cut
One finger with his knife,
Than her white flesh, so firm and smooth,
Rippled with sudden life!
Now if a cobweb touched his face,
This moment, in that haunted place,
He would have fallen to the ground,
Caught in a net of steel, and bound;
A little leaf, dropped on his head,
Would be a bolt to strike him dead :
But when he heard the lady sigh,
And saw her body rising there,
A second fear released the first,
From stupor into active fear;

And when outside that vault again,
With space to use his trembling knees,
He ran and ran—nor thought of light,
Or shadows under trees.
The first thoughts of that lady
Were delicate and pure:
She looked to see if her fair body
Was covered well and sure ;
Her second thoughts were home and love—
And quickly did that lady move.
Home to her husband, where that man,
In misery full and deep,
Kneels at an empty chair and sobs ;
To her two little ones that sleep—
They are so small in size
That their sweet tender mouths are still
No bigger than their wondering eyes.
What joy, and what astonishment
For him, who suffers for her sake !
But the little ones will certainly
Expect their mother when they wake.







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